

RESOURCE FACILITATION: A SOLUTION TO HELP NEBRASKA VETERANS

Issue

There are gaps in services for veterans with brain injury in the state of Nebraska. Because of the number of veterans returning to Nebraska with brain injury, there is an increased need for awareness, outreach, support, and education about brain injury as veterans return to their communities.



Background

According to the Rand Center for Military Health Policy and Research, approximately 320,000 or 19.5 % of U.S. service members returning from Afghanistan and Iraq have reported experiencing a traumatic brain injury during deployment. Since brain injury screening began in April of 2007, 3,416 Nebraska veterans have been screened for brain injury. Of those screened, nearly 7% have screened positive for TBI. For a variety of reasons, many veterans are not getting screened for brain injury once they are in their community because they choose to seek medical attention from the civilian sector vs. returning to the Veteran Administration (VA) hospital or clinics where the screening takes place. Statistically, the VA reports only 40% of the veterans return to the VA health care system once they are in their community. Because of this low return rate, it is important for us to provide a systematic way to facilitate the connections between VA services and the civilian sector.

The Nebraska Veterans Brain Injury Task Force has been developed to identify where there are gaps in services for veterans returning to Nebraska. This task force has representatives from the civilian sector, the military, and government. Although there has been great effort on the part of the VA and the Department of Defense (DoD) to provide support to the veterans as they return, it is evident brain injury in Nebraska remains a larger problem than any one entity can manage alone. The Nebraska Veterans Brain Injury Task Force (and supported by findings from RAND Center for Military Health Policy Research) find returning veterans with brain injury need support not only from the VA and DoD, but also from employers, educators, the local health care systems, the state, and their community to be successful.

Improving access to brain injury resources can save money and improve outcomes. The RAND report states unless treated, symptoms such as brain injury can have far-reaching and damaging consequences. The delivery of effective and timely care can reduce the longer term societal cost of low productivity, reduced quality of life, homelessness, domestic violence, and strain on families.

Recommendations

Nebraska needs to establish a system of resource facilitation for individuals with brain injury, including veterans. Resource facilitation will help identify and link returning veterans with brain injuries who were not a part of the VA screening, or were missed, to available services in the VA system. The VA system would be able to partner with a resource facilitator as they transition veterans back to the community by accessing available community resources.

If you have a constituent that has questions regarding brain injury please have them call Toll Free 888.806.6287 or visit www.braininjury.ne.gov There are also Support groups for families throughout the state as part of the Brain Injury Group of Nebraska, contact Kate at 402-430-0722.